



THE TWO CAMERONS

*"We'll be Friends Forever, won't we, Pooh?" asked Piglet
"Even longer," Pooh answered.*

– A.A Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Cameron Montibeler and Cameron O'Brien met each other on the first day of the new School Starters Program at Mater Dei on 29 May 2000.

For us parents, the idea of school was a very daunting thought as the boys have a moderate intellectual disability and we felt that they were not ready to commence school. "How do you send a child to school when there seemed to be so many obstacles in their way?" we asked ourselves. Milestones hadn't yet been reached and both boys were non verbal. We felt they were just too little for school.

Mater Dei came as a blessing and the commencement of the School Starters Program proved to be perfect timing. The boys attended three days a week at first then progressed to five full days. At the end of the program, which went for two years, the decision was made for the boys to remain at Mater Dei, as mainstream school was not an option for them. They moved into Year 1 and have been firm friends ever since.

"The Two Camerons," as they refer to themselves, share a love of laughter and enjoy lots of giggles and comments of "oh gosh" with each other. They are always together in the classroom and on the playground. They enjoy walking together with arms linked and smiles on their happy faces.

They both attend the Living Skills Program, where for two nights a week they share the same room. They have learnt many new skills. Cameron O likes to take the bins out and Cameron M likes to go shopping. They cook, make their beds, choose TV shows, go Tenpin bowling and out for dinner.

These skills have come home with them and they enjoy helping out.

Their confidence and independence is blossoming. This confidence shone through when they performed in the Mater Dei Performing Arts Night last year as Buzz and Woody from the movie, Toy Story.

In their senior years they have participated in the Structured Workplace Learning Program which has given them the opportunity to work at Afford Packaging in Ingleburn and the Camden Meals on Wheels program. They both love going to work and helping others.

This year the boys are in Year 12 and, you guessed right, they sit together in the same classroom. One of their class teachers, Rowena Kennedy, says the boys have a unique and genuine friendship and while they have their individual interests, they are truly supportive of each other both in and out of the classroom. "It has been a pleasure to teach them and help them reach their individual goals. While I will miss their cheerful smiles and their daily greetings of 'Two Camerons,' I know that no matter whatever the future holds for them, they will always have a friend to rely on."

They are very excited about the end of year celebrations and the all important Formal where they can dress up in their suits and dance the night away with their classmates and teachers.

2014 will be a new beginning for the boys, but they will always have the wonderful friendship they forged at Mater Dei, like Pooh and Piglet. This friendship is special, just like them, and we are sure it will carry them through their lives, with many giggles and "oh goshes" along the way.

Fiona Montibeler and Debbie O'Brien